Empowerment

A Primer

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When people are organized, …they move into the central decision-making tables downtown and say, "We are people, and damn it, you're going to listen to us!"

—Saul Alinsky (1968), The Democratic Promise[1]

Another way to think about empowerment is what I term solidarity. Whereas collaborative efforts celebrate the uniqueness of each participant, solidarity-focused groups seek to present a united front in public. They represent themselves in a single voice, as they try to fight their way into the "closed" spaces controlled by the powerful. They seek a place at these "central decision-making tables," in Alinsky's terms, from the epigraph earlier, attempting to become relatively equal players. While, in the ideal, collaboration rejects *power over* and works to *generate* new *power with* in deliberations, the solidarity approach treats power as relatively *zero-sum* and seeks to take power away from the powerful, gaining its own modicum of *power over.*

Note, again, that collaboration sometimes implicitly accepts the importance of *power over*, aiming for a decision that becomes binding on all involved. And solidarity efforts generally support internal forms of deliberation in determining what they will seek and how they will seek it before a group coalesces around a decision. In some ways then, collaboration and solidarity become two sides of the same coin. However, solidarity-focused actors do not apologize for their search for *power over*—it is a legitimate, central, intentional goal and not just a tension-filled compromise position.

This focus on acquiring *power over* not only affects how solidarity groups operate internally but how they view the world. For example, Alinsky, the key formulator of the solidarity tradition, complained that collaborative groups could be extremely naïve. He termed the kind of

"agreements" achieved in spaces where people *acted* as if they were equal but actually held unequal power this way: "when one side gets the power and the other side gets reconciled to it, then we have reconciliation."[2] He didn't believe that the status quo would usually give up significant power easily. Most real changes, he argued, generally requires overt conflict, as the powerful begin to see that they may need to give up some of their *power over.* "Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world," Alinsky argued, "can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict."[3] Only through solidarity, by coming together across fractures between groups and contesting the powerful as a collective did he think that the relatively powerless had much chance at making real change on the issues that really mattered.

While many academics have written about the solidarity approach,[4] many of the key writers in this tradition and in the Civil Resistance approach that follows are what I call practitioner/scholars: writing about and trying to make sense of what they are actually doing as they do it. It is to the latter that I generally look.[5]

Two prominent contexts in which solidarity emerges on the Left are labor unionism and community organizing, although there are others. The commitments of labor and community organizing are similar, but I focus for a concrete example of solidarity, here, on the neo-Alinsky tradition of community organizing because that is where my background is strongest.[6] The neo-Alinsky approach illuminates important issues within the broader "solidarity" vision of social action.

Note that while many of my arguments would apply to many solidarity-based groups, I am interested here only in those efforts that are grounded in the deliberative dialogue of Chapter 6. In other words, I focus only on relatively *democratic* solidarity. The military, for example, represents a hierarchical approach to solidarity. There are many non- or less-democratic solidarity groups. Perhaps the most well-known are called "astroturf" groups (to distinguish them from "grassroots"), created by the wealthy (sometimes actually hiring professional actors) to act as if they represent a group of concerned citizens.[7] While my examples tend to be from the left or relatively moderate spaces of the political spectrum, there are substantial solidarity organizations of different types on the right as well, although these tend to be less grounded in democratic forms of decision-making. These include the National Rifle Association and the National Right to Life Committee. In fact, many conservatives are well versed in the Alinsky tradition, with the conservative Koch billionaire brothers recently sponsoring a series of workshops teaching a version of Alinsky-based organizing to right-wing activists.[8]

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Alinsky did not invent organizing, nor is his the only perspective on how to build power on the community level, but he was one of the first to formulate a clear framework. His first major organization, the Back of the Yards Community Council (BYCC), was created in one of the most oppressed areas of Chicago during the 1930s. He had been hired by a professor at the University of Chicago to create youth support organization on the collaborative model. But Alinsky was drawn, instead, to the titanic labor union battle taking place at the time between community workers and the enormous stockyards and canning plants at the core of the neighborhood that employed nearly everyone. After spending a great deal of time with the union organizers, he decided to create a community counterpart to the labor union in the Back of the Yards. Years later he described the Back of the Yards this way: it

> was the nadir of all slums in America. People were crushed and demoralized, either jobless or getting starvation wages, diseased, living in filthy, rotting, unheated shanties, with barely enough food and clothing to keep alive. And it was a cesspool of hate; the Poles, Slovaks, Germans, Negroes, Mexicans and Lithuanians all hated each other and all of them hated the Irish, who returned the sentiment in spades.[9]

Collaboration begins with the assumption that people are coming together to discuss, in some reasonable way, how to move forward on a common project. Alinsky's approach also assumes a great deal of dialogue is necessary to come together for action. However, he also emphasizes the importance of self-interest in encouraging people to work with others they might disdain. In the Back of the Yards, for example, Alinsky did not start by trying to get people to dialogue across their disagreements to overcome their distaste for each other. Instead, he worked to show them why they *needed* each other by presenting them with a common enemy and goal—in this case the stockyards and the benefits a union would provide. Instead of appealing to objectivity, he did the opposite, seeking in his organizing work to "rub raw the resentments of the people of the community; fan the latent hostilities of many of the people" against the powerful, who were oppressing them, "to the point of overt expression."[10] Once engaged in a common project based on mutual need, he believed, would the people come to know each other as human beings and form relationships across community chasms. The process of organizing would engage them with each other in dialogue, often collaborative dialogue, and shift their perspectives.

The focus of solidarity organizing is on the pragmatic task of coming to sufficient agreement to allow the group to emerge into the public realm and make demands in a *single* voice. Alinsky's experience was that through this process people formed relationships, came to see each other as individuals, and became willing to make compromises with each other even if they did not actually change their perspectives in any deep way.

No one had really believed Alinsky could bring the leaders of the Back of the Yards community together into a single organization. So when he managed it, drawing in the powerful Catholic Church as well, the stockyards finally gave in and allowed the first union in their history. Out of this experience, along with efforts to create organizing groups in different locations across the Midwest, Alinsky wrote *Reveille for Radicals*, which codified the lessons he had learned and launched community organizing as a coherent approach in America.[11]

By self-interest, it is important to emphasize that organizers are not referring to selfishness. They want people who are driven by some deep-seated reasons to participate, but not people who are just out to get something for themselves. The latter would not make effective community leaders for obvious reasons. Organizers might start by recruiting "selfish" people, but unless these people become transformed through their experience with others and begin to seek what is best for their community, not just for themselves, they will not be healthy participants for the organization. Alinsky told the story of David and Roger who were recruited because they wanted more people to purchase things from their stores but who, through personal experience with the real horrors of child poverty, came to see the needs of the community as central to their own self-interests as well.[12] Only then did they become productive leaders of the organization. Moving members in this direction is, in part, the job of an organizer, discussed later.

Collaboration shies away from substantive leadership because leadership dilutes its commitment to fully equal participation and control. The solidarity tradition, in contrast, focuses almost entirely on leaders and leadership. Deeply conscious of the "paradox of size," organizing seeks ways to legitimately determine who "counts" as a leader in the community. As Alinsky noted, "it is obviously impossible to get all of the people to talk with one another. *The only way that you can reach people is through their own representatives or their own leaders.*"[13] In Alinsky's day, when communities were filled with strong religious and ethnic organizations, leaders were often those who were already seen as representing in some way the interests of their followers. Organizers would go around and talk to people to figure out who

they *really* looked up to, and then try to recruit these leaders. Today, when communities are more fractured, organizers still seek these "native" leaders, but have also developed strategies to develop new leaders who have a relationship with a following. One key strategy is the "one on one" interview.[14] In essence, prospective leaders go around and interview people in whatever group they come from. Theylearn the perspectives, desires, and beliefs of those they would represent while also developing relationships with them. The goal in both approaches is to develop a coterie of leaders who are explicitly acknowledged as leaders by those who *both* follow *and* guide them.

Note that organizing does not completely solve the problem of scale—it only mitigates it. It is called "community" organizing because it generally organizes around spaces small enough for individuals to know some of their leaders on a personal basis and the leaders can come to know their fellows. They often represent groups of congregations in a city or sections of a city, staying small enough to maintain this connection. There were organizations that operated on a more national level like ACORN and National People's Action, but they generally operated as federations of organizations, and national leadership were necessarily somewhat distant from local people.[15] Something similar could be said of the civil rights movement, since most actions happened in specific places, like Birmingham, with King often coming in late in the game to communities already organized by local leaders and organizers.[16]

Community organizing groups in the ideal are literally rooted in their communities. Like trees, the trunk of leaders draws on its roots of community members spread across the neighborhood. This tight connection between leader and follower, in the ideal, integrates this form of empowerment into its local arena.

Ultimately, in the ideal at least, community organizing groups are deliberative democratic communities made up of "representative" leaders who have relationships with followers from a range of different communities. Since leaders bring the perspectives of their followers into the space with them and then can bring their followers with them to social actions, this approach allows a large amount of *power with* to come together around a manageable group of deliberators. There is almost always a group of elected officers in these groups, but internally, again in the ideal, the work operates in a mostly deliberative manner as people work out what they can come to solidarity around and then what they can agree to do about these issues. Organizing groups do also usually come together in mass meetings as well to vote on key actions and the like, but most of the work is done beforehand by leaders

and the votes are often by acclamation. This was Alinsky's pragmatic response to the challenge of scale.

It is important to acknowledge that when groups like Occupy come together as members of the 99%, they are also necessarily made up of representatives of the larger community—although they do not acknowledge this. They only include those who have the privilege of time and the interest to show up. These are *unaccountable* representatives. So from the beginning *any* collaborative effort that seeks to act on behalf of a larger community, to act as its "representative," is already made up of community leadership. While the solidarity model chooses leaders somewhat informally, there is at least a logic of accountable representation at work. The leadership role of actors in organizing is foregrounded, not disguised.

Collaboration struggles with the role of facilitators. In contrast, "organizers," who essentially act as facilitators, are "baked in" to the Alinsky tradition from the beginning. They are the paid staff who do the grunt work to keep an otherwise volunteer community organizing group working. Alinsky was originally trained as an ethnographer, and the job of organizers is to first immerse themselves into the community life to the extent that they are swept "into a close" and deeply informed "identification" with it, projecting themselves "into its plight."[17] "The foundation of a People's Organization," Alinsky argued,

> is in the communal life of the local people. Therefore the first stage in the building of a People's Organization is the understanding of the life of a community, not only in terms of the individual's experiences, habits, values, and objectives, but also from the point of view of collective habits, experiences, customs, controls, and values of the whole group—the community traditions.[18]

In fact, Alinsky-based groups are very sensitive to the cultural practices of participants. Some communities may be more hierarchical than others. Some are more quick to act than others. And the like. Organizers teach their members lessons about the power public, framing this in language that fits with their existing culture. They seek to develop solidarity and draw members into collective action while developing mutually supportive relationships, treading lightly other on local community practices. In contrast, learning deliberative democracy, as in Dewey's Laboratory School, or as described by Friere, can be an intensive intervention into people's social practices.[19] Thus, there may be less imposition of *invisible* power on participants involved in most Alinsky-based training.

Because organizing groups are made up of leaders, a core aim of organizers is to develop new leaders. As Marshall Ganz notes, organizers "help leaders enhance their skills, articulate their values, and formulate their commitments, and then they work to develop a relationship of mutual responsibility and accountability between a constituency and its leaders."[20]

Beyond developing new leaders, organizers play a gamut of traditional facilitator roles, engaging people together in mutually supportive ways. They work to make people heard, attempt to tamp down those who might try to dominate, and the like.

Organizers are also teachers. They train leaders in strategy and initiate them into what they call the skills of public action and citizenship. Instead of providing relatively abstract examples and ideas, or case studies from other contexts, as a "critical theory-" oriented educator might, they follow Freire and Dewey and educate *amidst* group action against the powerful. They facilitate reflection on actions, and scaffold leaders toward new understandings of social change and skills for social action. While there are stand-alone trainings, very little learning takes place in a traditional classroom-like setting.[21]

Individual transformation is not an explicit goal of organizing, but organizers argue that transformation is a common outcome of participation and implicitly part of the job of organizers as they move groups into action. Dick Harmon stressed that "the organizer is an intimate partner in that transformation of persons."[22] As group members work together, they "get to know each other as human beings…. Prejudices are broken down and human attitudes are generated in this new relationship." An effective group engages in reflection after a conflict with someone powerful. Through dialogue,

> the people begin to discover that each…[participant has similar] feelings…. And what happens when people share those feelings, is the discovery that they are in the fight together…. Their privatization begins to break down [, and this] is the beginning of *solidarity*…. Life starts to get a hell of a lot more vivid and meaningful.[23]

The organizer Shel Trapp remembered, "See, I tried changing people for seven years as a minister. Nobody ever fucking changed from one of my sermons, I can guarantee you that. But the number of people I've seen change dramatically" in organizing….[24]

Early organizations start small by winning a few limited victories that prove to members that they can, in fact, wrest some small modicum of *power over* from the powerful. These early efforts are the

most important training grounds for leaders, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to take on larger campaigns. Organizers help leaders learn the language of "hidden" power, so that when they do manage to break into the *closed* spaces controlled by the powerful and take their place at the tables where decisions are made, they can act effectively. Organizers "develop accurate confidence and competence in a person so that he can effectively negotiate his way among the power institutions which affect his life."[25]

Confrontations with the powerful often take the form of set pieces, like theater. Leaders are given roles to play, learning how to engage with the stratagems of the powerful from organizers. Because the responses of the powerful are unpredictable, they role-play different possible reactions in private. Because "the people" almost never, even in solidarity, have the power to force the powerful to do anything, organizers try to put the powerful off balance with what Alinsky called "mass jujitsu." Organizations conduct collective actions outside of the experience of the powerful. The powerful are faced with conditions they are not prepared for, react badly, and then have to deal with the results of their own actions. An example of this outside of the Alinsky tradition came accidentally during the Chicano Movement of the 1970s. Students on a peaceful school walkout were attacked viciously by the police when they wouldn't disperse. The police weren't prepared to respond and reacted badly. TV showed images of youth being clubbed in the streets. While one might initially think this was terrible (and in one sense, of course, it was), from an organizing standpoint, it was helpful. "Rebelling" students became public victims. This brought wavering and even oppositional members of the community into active support.[26] "The real action," Alinsky stressed, "is in the enemy's reaction," because, ultimately, "a winning tactic depends on the other side blundering into the trap you set for them." And he was "a past master at goading the other side to lose its cool."[27] In another example, one time, "in the middle of the Depression," Alinsky "needled the Chicago Democratic machine into canceling the free-milk program for poor kids, thus bringing a national furor down on themselves, retreating in short order and losing the skirmish."[28] We know this often doesn't work, but it can, especially if prepared for.

The organizer is driven by a desire to build power among the relatively powerless (however the organizer defines this), and so, organizers avoid taking stands on the most relevant issues to work on. It is the job of organizers to facilitate the desires and hopes of the community, not to push their own agenda, addressing issues that "people are genuinely struggling with."[29] The ethic of the organizer is to support

the goals of the community unless these seem ethically unacceptable. At some point, the only option (aside from some gentle intervention) is to quit. The organizer "wants to draw out of the people their feelings, their reflection, so the pieces of answers" an organizer provides "whet the people's curiosity and their appetite for more action."[30] In fact, through modeling it is hoped that leaders learn to act as quasi-organizers themselves "so the skills spread progressively among a continually expanding group of people."[31] This organizer role is well defined in the tradition, and leaders should be well versed in it so that it's clear when an organizer is acting legitimately. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted, albeit uncomfortably, that organizers do inevitably play a quasi-leadership role. They have a great deal of influence over the direction the organization will move, strategically and otherwise, and constantly need to decide how much of this influence they will use. Organizing groups accept that there is no such thing as a pure facilitator who does not also exert some leadership powers, whether the person means to or not.

Note that these general roles of organizers are essentially the same in the solidarity tradition and in the civil resistance tradition discussed in Chapter 8, although the specific strategies promoted are different. Also, in the civil resistance tradition, there does not generally seem to be such a strict distinction between leader and organizer. Leaders often move back and forth into and from organizer roles, and may mix these roles. For example, Cesar Chavez in the National Farm Workers Union (NFW) was both a leader of the organization and an organizer at the same time.

In collaborative groups, in the ideal at least, collaboration is both the process *and* the goal of the engagement. While many efforts do conclude in decisions that have the force of *power over*, this is a compromise, not a feature of the approach. It was for this reason that Occupy, for example, could never arrive at any demands. While the process of collaboration is a central part of organizing activity, organizers see it as *preparation* for emergence into spaces where the organization will attempt to put pressure on the powerful, which could be *open* spaces, or *invited* spaces the group creates itself or attempts to take over, or *closed* spaces of the powerful the group forces its way into. Collaboration, then, is one of a range of different practices used internally in addition to strict uses of Roberts Rules of Order, voting to make decisions, role-playing to prepare for confrontations with the powerful, and the like. Collaborative practice is important in organizing groups, but it serves as a tool, not an overarching ethic that drives action. The ultimate goal of organizing, to coalesce into *solidarity*

around demands for some portion of *zero-sum power over*, has strong effects on what happens inside such groups as they prepare for this move to solidarity.

Within a solidarity organization (in its own *self-created, closed* arena) it is completely legitimate that relatively free dialogues of some form take place about how issues will be "cut" and how leaders will represent the organization. A collective voice can coalesce in a range of interactions within an organization—in informal discussions between members, more formal meetings of subcommittees, etc. As one comes closer to actual emergence into the realm of power, however, fluidity progressively closes down, to the point where, in role-plays, leaders practice how to embody the collective "voice" of the organization in the realms beyond. Some communities will foster more internal dialogue, some much less.[32]

This focus on solidarity and conflict is complicated by the fact that relationships with powerful people are still relationships. Leaders of organizing groups do often attempt to develop individual relationships with those they are also involved in confronting. The hope is to recruit them to the organization's side and to give them reasons beyond self-interest to listen to the concerns of the organizing group. These relationships are often crucial in generating policy "wins" that might not otherwise have occurred without the combination of personal and public relationships. Mere conflict is often not enough and can even alienate the opposition to the point that it is unwilling to compromise. In fact, organizing groups will often seek opportunities for collaboration with the powerful, when this is possible. However, collaboration with the powerful is generally only possible when organizations hold and can continually demonstrate counterbalancing power. Holding power and maintaining the capacity to engage in conflict is crucial in ensuring that the powerful stay at the table. While there is an effort to foster a kind of public "friendship," a motto of organizing groups is that they have no "permanent friends, no permanent enemies." They are always willing to leave the table and turn to more confrontational strategies when they discover their voice is not being listened to. In the realm of the powerful, the ability to demonstrate power is usually a requirement for engaging in effective collaboration, and is absolutely required for more self-interest focused negotiations.

Because of their very different logics of action, collaborative and solidarity-oriented groups can have great difficulty working with each other. The Occupy Movement tried to work together with groups like unions, but the movement's failure to ever formulate the kind of concrete demands that unions wanted drove them apart. Fred Rose studied

efforts by unions and collaborative groups to work together and found that participants in the collaboration-focused groups often felt oppressed unless they were allowed to say what they thought regardless of the context. In contrast, union leaders demanded conformity to the "party line" in more public settings. At one point a member of a collaborative group got up at a meeting with the powerful and contradicted the agreed-upon stance. Confronted by the union, the collaborative group didn't seem to understand the problem with everyone being able to have their own voice. Not surprisingly, the alliance broke up soon after.[33] Solidarity proponents argue that groups can only hope to prevail in fights with the powerful if participants are willing to give up their unique perspectives when they emerge into what I term the "power public."

Certainly there are examples like ACT-UP that demonstrate the capacity for non-solidarity-based strategies to win out against the powerful, but in general there is some truth to the idea that efforts to grasp *zero-sum power over* are often doomed to failure without some commitment to solidarity.[34]

In fact, the powerful understand well how important solidarity is for the less powerful. One key strategy the powerful use is to try to split communities into squabbling factions. This is how they kept the Back of the Yards powerless for so many decades.

A central aim of solidarity groups is to win meaningful changes in their members' lives. Each win overcomes hopelessness. As the group's reputation expands, more members and leaders are drawn in. A community increasingly sees that it can "fight city hall." Community organizing groups aim to become the voice of the community so that powerful individuals and groups will consult with them *before* taking actions that affect their communities. They seek to gain a permanent place at the table in the closed spaces where most decisions are made, while continuing conflict in open spaces to maintain their strength.

Alinsky promoted organizing as a direct response to what he saw as the naïve tradition of collaborative democracy. For Occupy, "authentic" democracy could not (or should not) suppress the multiple perspectives of its participants. For Alinsky, in contrast, democracy involves legitimate (if only sometimes collaborative) joint action between leaders seeking to act in solidarity, speaking in a single voice, and grasping for *power over*.

It is important, however, to understand that Alinsky was as interested in fostering democracy as he was in the final *power over*. In some ways, fights over issues were as much tools for allowing the emergence of local democracy as they were separate goals of their own. Sounding much like Dewey and Freire, for example, he argued that when people are

organized, they get to know each other's point of view; they reach compromises on many of their differences, they learn that many opinions which they entertained solely as their own are shared by others, and they discover that many problems which they had thought of only as 'their' problems are common to all.

In fact, he argued that the actual decisions of an organization were less important than the goal of "getting people interested and participating in a democratic way."[35] At its core, for organizers in this tradition, community organizing aims to develop "a healthy, active, participating, interested, self-confident people who, through their participation and interest, become informed, educated, and above all develop faith in themselves, their fellow men, and the future."[36] Alinsky worried that unless people had access to participation in strong forms of local democracy they would be fodder for demagogues. Alinsky believed that if you could bring leaders together to fight for common aims, you would reconstruct the nature of local communities and build a more healthy civic realm for all, bridging fractures in the political and social realm. In its own way, then, Alinsky's vision was as "prefigurative" as Occupy. The world it prefigured was simply different. It sought to model an equally authentic, effective form of distributed democracy for those who were marginalized in American society.

A range of groups and networks support community-based organizing groups around the nation, including the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Gamaliel Foundation, PICO, National People's Action, and more. Growing numbers of youth organizing efforts have emerged outside of schools and traditional youth-serving organizations.[37] One rarely finds solidarity-oriented work happening in traditional human service fields or institutions, however, because the process can threaten the structure of these institutions themselves as well as the positions of the powerful who generally fund them. Many nonprofits have found themselves defunded when they dared to engage in solidarity work (or in the civil resistance work discussed next). But the tendency of Alinsky and other organizers to disparage social workers and the like seems unfair. It seems unreasonable to critique workers for avoiding activities that would simply get them fired, and that would not end up resulting in robust organizing efforts in any case. Instead, organizing projects are generally self-funded by participants and by sympathetic foundations.

Overall, the solidarity approach moves along the continuums of power in a range of ways very different from those of individual and collaborative visions of empowerment. Perhaps most obviously, the

solidarity approach seeks access to *closed* spaces controlled by the powerful and teaches members the *hidden* practices of the powerful so that the people can negotiate with them as equals when they claim their seat at the table. Solidarity is often grounded in *power with* but seeks to gain *power over*. In this way, it seeks to transform how the powerful negotiate with the relatively powerless and helps the formerly powerless to see themselves as potentially powerful. At the same time, organizing represents a fundamental intervention into the *invisible* oppressive forces of society. Through its wins and public demonstrations of power it seeks to transform understandings of what is possible and what is not, about "who" people are and what capacities they have.

Notes

1 *The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and his Legacy,* produced by Bob Hercules and Bruce Orenstein (San Francisco, CA: Independent Television Service, 1999).
2 Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 13.
3 Ibid., 21.
4 These include: Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*; Dennis Shirley, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), Conner and Rosen, *Contemporary Youth Activism*; Aaron Schutz and Marie Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing* (New York: Palgrave, 2010); David Walls, *Community Organizing* (New York: Polity, 2014).
5 Practitioner/scholars in addition to Alinsky include: Heather Booth, "Direct Action Organizing: A Handbook for Women," in *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*, edited by Miller and Schutz (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015); Edward T. D. Chambers and Michael A. Cowan, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Gary Delgado, *Organizing the Movement: The Roots and Growth of ACORN* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986); Mike Miller, *Community Organizing: A Brief Introduction* (Milwaukee, WI: Euclid Avenue Press, 2012); Robert Moses and Charles E. Cobb, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (New York: Beacon Press, 2002).
6 Alinsky 1972 and 1946; for writings on union organizing see, e.g., AFSCME. *Building Power in the Workplace: The AFSCME Internal Organizing Manual*. Author. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from www.campusactivism.org/displayresource-751.htm. It might also be possible to use the term "civil society" as part of this argument, but the term has been overused and its meaning blurred in recent years, further many understandings of the phrase would not fit this particular discussion.
7 Edward T. Walker, "Between Grassroots and "Astroturf": Understanding Mobilization from the Top Down," in *Sage Handbook of Resistance*, edited by David Courpasson and Steven Vallas (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2016), 269–279.

8 Parker and Haberman, "Koch Brothers' Academy."
9 Cited in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 3.
10 Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*.
11 Alinsky, *Reveille*.
12 Alinsky, *Reveille*, 97–98.
13 Alinsky, *Reveille*, p. 64, italics added.
14 Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*.
15 See Schutz and Miller, *People Power*.
16 Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
17 Alinsky, *Reveille*, 74.
18 Ibid., 98–99.
19 Dewey, *Democracy and Education*; Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*; and Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These are elaborate strategies for moving people toward new ways of thinking and being. You will not find comparable texts in the solidarity tradition.
20 Marshall Ganz cited in Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*, 205.
21 See Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*; also Schutz and Miller, *People Power*.
22 Dick Harmon, "An Offer We Can't Refuse," in *People Power*, edited by Schutz and Miller, 185–194.
23 Harmon "An Offer We Can't Refuse," 190.
24 Shel Trapp cited in Schutz and Miller, *People Power*, 155.
25 Harmon, "An Offer We Can't Refuse," 186.
26 Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1996).
27 von Hoffman, *Radical*, 143.
28 ibid., 156.
29 Harmon, "An Offer We Can't Refuse," 191.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 191.
32 Paul Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
33 Rose, *Coalitions Across the Class Divide*.
34 Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community*; Stall and Stoecker, "Community Organizing or Organizing Community?"; Celina Su, *Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
35 Alinsky, *Reveille*, 73.
36 Ibid., 78.
37 Conner and Rosen, *Contemporary Youth Activism*; Melvin Delgado and Lee Staples, *Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Shawn Ginwright, Pedro Noguera, and Julio Cammarota, *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

8 Civil resistance

Civil Resistance draws on but transforms components of all the afore-mentioned forms, adding ideas from social movements. Mark Engler, Paul Engler, and Carlos Saavedra use the term "momentum" to de-scribe what I believe represents one of the most sophisticated ways to put civil resistance into actual practice, and I use their term largely interchangeably with civil resistance.[1] (Much of the literature on nonviolent resistance also overlaps with writing on civil resistance.)[2] Again, many of the key writers on civil resistance are practitioner/activist/scholars, and I focus on these here.[3]

As in the solidarity chapter, where I chose community organizing as an illustrative example, here, I look to the specific tenets of the momentum approach to civil resistance as an example of civil resistance more broadly. While groups have pursued a myriad of pragmatic con-ceptions of civil resistance that diverge in a range of ways from the momentum vision, the specific tenets of momentum illuminate important strengths and weaknesses of the range of approaches that fit loosely within the civil resistance umbrella.

While this section focuses on civil resistance, which distinguishes itself from social movements, I often refer to *aspects* of momentum efforts as "movements" because movement approaches form part of a wider momentum concept.

It is useful to examine social movements before moving to more diverse conceptions of civil resistance. Traditionally, in the academic literature, the concept of "social movement" captures a wide range of efforts that share some basic characteristics. While most involve more structure than is visible from the outside (e.g., the organizing group that created the Occupy Movement and its system of facilita-tion), they are often conceptualized as relatively unpredictable mass conflagrations that spring up to contest some oppressive aspect of society. In contrast with solidarity, most people participate without

formal membership in any discrete organization. Movements draw on multiple approaches to social action, with multiple "camps" of participants loosely coupled together into a common effort. And differences in style, goals, beliefs, and the like can create tensions. Unlike solidarity institutions, which are "made" in part by organizers, movement moments seem to simply "happen," even if they are partially planned for by different affinity groups, as in Occupy. Movements cannot be predicted with any certainty, often surprising even those who participate. The literature on social movements is vast but largely academic.[4] It tends to describe *what* happens but does not illuminate many strategies for making movements happen.

Proponents of movements have often attacked the solidarity tradition, and vice versa—there is little love lost between those associating themselves with these conceptions. (Key exceptions are new forms of "social movement unionism," where unions work on common issues with community groups.)[5] Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (also activists and academics) famously dismissed solidarity-based efforts as incapable of developing sufficient power for substantial social change. Real power, they argued, requires mass "strike waves, sit-ins… [and] other forms of civil disobedience." The system, they believed, would only change if there was so much disruption that the powerful had to make concessions to tamp this down. Examples include the voting rights bill during the civil rights movement and the ascendance of unions during the 1930s and 1940s. They noted that a movement has a "rare and fleeting character. It erupts, flowers, and withers, all in a moment." So, movement activists need to act quickly, and not worry so much about coordination. Cloward and Piven's motto was "Get people what you can, while you can."[6] Their recommendations for how to do this, however, remained vague.

Alinsky and those associated with his vision, for their part, have often disparaged social movements. Alinsky, for example, critiqued Martin Luther King's SCLC for not creating "a stable, disciplined, power organization."[7] Even today, as Heidi Swarts noted, community organizers still see movements as "transitory…naïve, idealistic…[and] ineffective."[8]

The "momentum" approach seeks to overcome the limitations of relatively unstructured social movements by drawing a new hybrid "momentum" model out of a range of historical examples and experiences of both movement and solidarity approaches. Engler and Engler and Carlos Saavedra draw on the writings and work of an eclectic collection of examples, scholars, and practitioner/scholars, including the Otpor movement in Serbia, the civil rights movement, Alinsky, Bill Moyer, etc.[9]

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First, in the momentum model, in the ideal, a group of leaders emerges early on that has some justification to represent the affected group. Leaders can be those who do the initial work, as in the Harvard sit-in described later. Or leaders can emerge out of early localized fights for change, as King did in the year-long struggle in Montgomery. Or they can be recognized as key leaders of previous efforts, as in the Serbian Otpor movement or the US Dreamer movement. Or, as in Occupy, they present themselves as experienced or early adopters of an approach to action developed elsewhere that they hope others will join.

Second, this collection of leaders agrees on what Engler and Engler and Saavedra call the DNA of the momentum effort. Instead of defining specific tactics, which will emerge creatively in local arenas developed by local leaders, the DNA defines the explicitly stated *hidden* core culture of the effort. Think of the structure of deliberation and hand gestures in Occupy. They defined what kinds of actions would and would not be acceptable—e.g., that the movement would generally be nonviolent (and what this means).This culture includes understandings of the *kind* of efforts that are likely to put the opposition off-guard (what Alinsky and Sharp called jujitsu).[10]

The dangers of the lack of a common DNA is shown by the history of the anti-Vietnam War movement. Despite huge demonstrations and thousands of creative tactics, scholars generally agree that because of a range of strategic mistakes and fractious actions, their ability to stop the war was limited, and activists were often "played" by President Nixon. In fact, burning the flag or denigrating the military or dressing oddly and acting like hippies often alienated the working class, whose children were dying in the highest numbers.[11]

Third, the leadership encourages participants to create "trigger events." Instead of waiting for a movement moment, they try to create one. For example, a group of Harvard students held a "sit in" in the administration building, demanding a living wage for campus staff. Leaders had done their research, built interest and relationships, and tried earlier efforts like petitions. They sought to use the sit-in as another trigger action. In this case, it worked. Senator Ted Kennedy unexpectedly showed up. "Organizers outside decided to escalate by setting up a tent city" making "the occupation dramatically more visible." And the local movement "took off" breaking "into the national media."[12] Eventually they won, and the movement spread to at least 40 other campuses. The lunch counter sit-ins launched by black college students during the civil rights movement were another famous trigger action, spreading across the nation.[13]

Note that this diverges significantly from the collaborative approach. Momentum efforts have distinct leaders and make clear demands. As in the solidarity approach, a diverse range of discursive strategies are used within organizations to make decisions, and such decisions are critical to the success of the civil resistance effort. Deliberation remains the center of the structure of decision-making but is not religiously followed. Civil resistance efforts are much more pragmatic and focused on social change than collaborative efforts like Occupy, which attempted to constantly *be* the change it wanted to see.

Fourth comes absorption. Movement moments are evanescent, so, momentum leaders collect the contact information of everyone they can at big actions and provide ways for people to move up the "ladder" of participation. Active participation can range from talking to friends to giving money online to coming to actions to becoming leaders. Mass trainings are critical, catching potential leaders before they go off in their own potentially problematic directions and integrating them into the movement. Shared DNA allows the development of very loosely related but not "loose cannon" organizations.[14] The momentum approach allows a shift away from the rooted vision of community organizing, which focuses on forming strong communities in particular places. Instead, one grows seeds of local groups attached relatively loosely attached to the larger organization, holding unpredictable actions in a wide range of locations. Leaders in this vision are defined more by their skills and their ability to creatively find ways to mobilize groups of people to act and less, as in the case of the Alinsky-based model, on their connection to some specific group of followers.

Sharp emphasizes that the aims of momentum efforts are fundamentally different from those of a solidarity effort.[15] Alinsky-based solidarity organizations seek to break their way into the closed spaces of the powerful with leaders who are conversant with the hidden procedures and processes that the powerful use to make decisions. The solidarity tradition sees power as something the powerful *own* and that the people are trying to take away. Sharp criticized what he called this "monolithic" vision of power. His own approach focused on how "social" power comes from the bottom. As seen in Figure 8.1, what he called social power in civil resistance is held by the people, as *power with*. If they withhold their collective support, the powerful can no longer rule and must either adjust to the new reality by changing their positions; be voted out of office; or, in countries under nondemocratic rulers, be deposed.[16] In fact, in a study of civil resistance actions around the world, Erica Chenoweth found that powerholders almost always give in when just 3.5% of the population become active
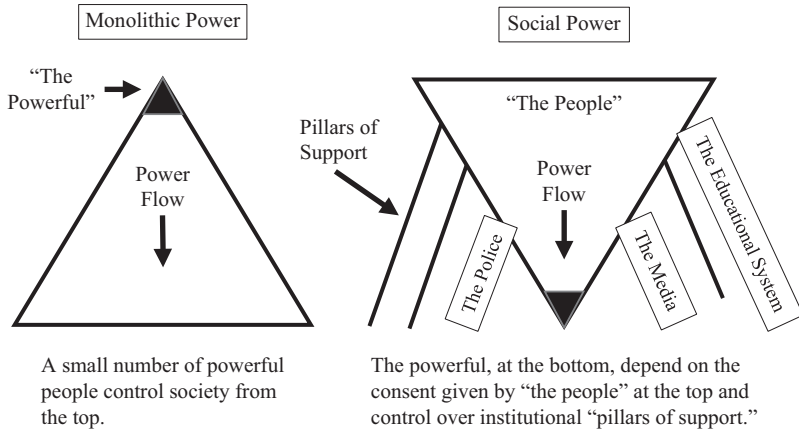
Monolithic Power

Social Power

"The Powerful"

"The People"

Pillars of Support

Power Flow

Power Flow

The Police

The Media

The Educational System

A small number of powerful people control society from the top.

The powerful, at the bottom, depend on the consent given by "the people" at the top and control over institutional "pillars of support."

Figure 8.1 Flows of power. Adapted from ibid., 13–14.

supporters. Solidarity proponents seek a space at the table at the tip of the pyramid; civil resistance proponents keep an eye on the polls (as do politicians) and try to shift the way the political wind is blowing.

Especially under conditions of oppressive governments, internationally, Sharp's vision conceptualizes the powerful as dependent on "pillars of support" from a range of institutions and from the people. As officers, managers, and everyday workers refuse to allow their institutions to operate (in oppressive dictatorships, the police and the military are critical), the pillars weaken and the powerful find the control levers they press no longer get the response from institutions.

A plurality of social power actions creatively contest the ruling *invisible* and *hidden* structures of power operate unpredictably across a wide scale. The DNA of the movement and untraceable lines of relationships connect these different actions. This means that the movement aspect of the civil resistance approach is, again, sometimes tied in shallower ways to local communities. A distinction is made in organizing between "mobilizing" and "organizing." "Mobilizing" involves using creative tactics and publicity to attract people to actions. "Organizing" involves reaching out to the followers of community organizing leaders, pulling (in theory) a relatively dependable group of actors into key actions. Because civil resistance tends to lean towards the "mobilizing" approach, conceptually, at least, it floats more shallowly on the surface of individual communities. Civil resistance efforts do not need to have the same kind of substantial membership that

organizing groups do. Flexibility and fluidity can come with a price of permanence and depth.

Note that the *form* of action in civil resistance can range from diverse forms of collaboration to fairly strict hierarchy to voting and more. Although civil resistance authors generally celebrate collaboration, the focus is on the entire system of resistance and not on any particular pure approach to engagement. Unlike Occupy, momentum efforts do generally come to agreement on demands, for example. Ultimately, it is the focus on influencing bottom-up *social* power, not *monolithic* top-down power, that most distinguishes civil resistance from the Alinsky approach.

Momentum proponents use jujitsu actions to illuminate problems in the status quo, seeking to shift attitudes in the population from opposition to neutral, from neutral to active supporters, etc. This generates "polarization" because, while popular support may shift in the direction of the movement, those who are losing generally become more reactionary and aggressive. In the specific case of the women's suffrage movement, broad support for women's right to vote increased, while the small group of those most opposed intensified in its resistance (and we can see these not-insignificant pockets of misogyny today). Similarly, in the civil rights movement, the public was riveted by and increasingly rejected the violent apartheid in the South in response to images of water cannons and dogs turned on children. At the same time, these demonstrations were also "a major boon for…[the] Ku Klux Klan." The increasing success of the movement provided support for racist politicians in some areas. "One historian called the two years after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act a "period of terrorism," with the burning of more than "two thousand black churches."[17] The point is not to celebrate horrifying occurrences but to understand that they *can* represent indicators of the success of civil resistance and not failure. (They can also represent disastrous failure—one never knows for certain in the moment). The destructive actions of reactionaries *can* help shift the population toward active support for the movement's perspective. But a great deal depends upon how members of the civil resistance groups act. Violence perpetrated by momentum groups can, for example, justify reactionary actions to the larger public and reduce popular support. Civil resistance efforts need to be extremely careful about the image they present.

A perfect example today is the case of immigration reform. The work of the Dreamer movement, among others, has slowly shifted public perception of immigrants despite the broad rhetoric against them in the political realm. From 1993 (a nadir of support) to now,

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the percentage of people against increased immigration has decreased from 65% to 35%, support for increased immigration has increased from 6% to 24%, and support for Obama era policies has moved from 6% to 24%.[18] These are enormous shifts and have continued throughout the Trump administration. At the same time, the vehemence of resistance among those opposed has increased in volume. With respect to the "dreamers," brought here illegally as children, support for permanent residency has increased to over 70% in different polls, again major shifts, driven, the Dreamer movement would argue, by their intense work in civil resistance. In fact, as I write prior to the midterm elections, a group of Republicans, many in districts with high numbers of immigrants, is trying to force a vote on immigration reform to save their seats amidst resistance from a leadership that fears a backlash from the polarized minority.[19]

The momentum approach can be confusing for those coming from the solidarity tradition because, like the solidarity approach, it also fights for discrete wins on issues. Gandhi sought to overturn the salt tax through his salt march. King sought to alter the status of African Americans in Birmingham. However, the actual agreements reached were often dissatisfying. Criticisms of these outcomes misunderstand the real goals of momentum efforts. The fight in Birmingham was centrally a tool to demonstrate to the public the depths of depravity Southern racists would stoop. The actual agreement reached was little more than window-dressing—a goal to justify the civil resistance action. While the solidarity tradition also seeks wider aims than just winning—conflict, for example, fosters local democracy and draws more participants—the specific achievements are more important to solidarity proponents than momentum proponents. The focus of a solidarity group is to grasp some of their own monolithic "power over," not to eventually pull the pillars down with Sharp's social "power with."

In fact, Engler and Engler argue that public acts of sacrifice (acts in the *open*) are critical to shifting public perception. They note that "a common misconception…[is that such sacrifice] is necessarily focused on touching the heart of the opponent." Instead, "sacrifice helps to address two of the great problems of public backlash and the danger of swift and severe repression." It generates public empathy and turns "crackdowns…into unexpected assets."[20] The goal is to affect *bystanders*, not the direct opposition, which may, in fact, become increasingly reactionary. Alinsky misunderstood this in critiques of the civil rights movement. He celebrated the "moral victory" and "public relations" triumph of King,[21] but attacked the movement

overall for intensifying reactionary responses. Alinsky didn't understand that, for good or ill, this kind of often vicious reaction was integral to the civil resistance model: an inevitable result of success and *hopefully* a driver for even more success in terms of increases in popular support.

Recent research on the effect of "facts" and rational argument on beliefs could be seen as a threat to the momentum approach to social change. Studies show that people become firmer in their initial beliefs when presented with information that contradicts them.[22] But momentum leaders respond to this challenge by "wrapping themselves in the flag," if you will. They base their efforts on commonly held commitments, like free speech, the right to equal treatment, and the like. Instead of asking for change, for example, they appeal to a return to the "true" core of American society. They appeal, as the civil rights movement did, to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. It is no accident that some conservative legal scholars similarly represent their perspective as "originalism" or that there are now "constitutional conservatives."[23] On the Left, writing in 1982, for example, Bill Moyer argued that "social movements must be based on widely held universal values." They must "place their social movement in the center of society" to "gain the support of the majority." This includes standing up for "the culture's fundamental values, such as justice, democracy, civil and human rights, security, and freedom" by showing how "the vested interests that use public office and corporate institutions in ways that violate these principles."[24]

Moyer developed a vision of a long-term process that can bring actors with very different understandings of change together in a common effort, what Engler and Engler call an "ecology." A key challenge, as we have seen, is that those committed to different approaches to action may not respect each other. Solidarity groups sometimes disparage movement-like efforts, and vice-versa. Those promoting collaboration denigrate efforts to coalesce into solidarity and grasp *power over*. Multiple proponents of different forms of empowerment attack advocacy groups that dare to speak *for* the oppressed instead of with them. Moyer tried to help activists understand that different approaches are necessary for long-term success. Figure 8.2 shows Moyer's diagram of the shifting level of contributions made by different groups.

Figure 8.2 shows how institutional reform groups initially seek to make change but are not radical enough to "raise hell" (column 1). They have much to lose after working often for years to achieve whatever positions they have and are disparaged by the "rebels," who, in fact,
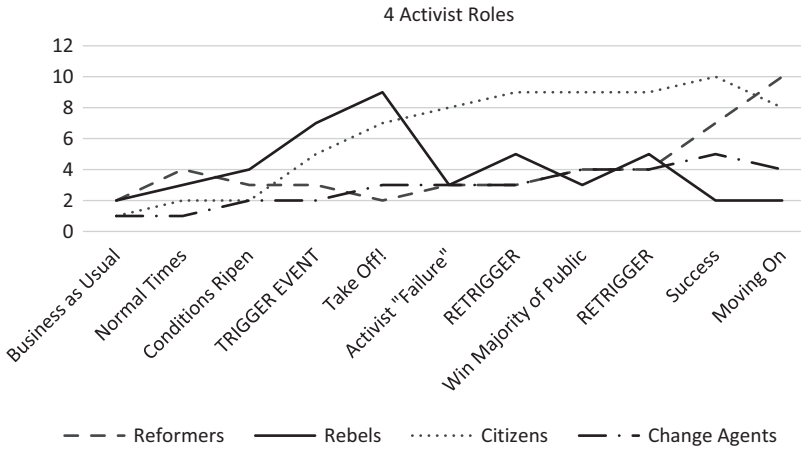
4 Activist Roles

Figure 8.2 The participation of four major activist roles. Ibid., 84–85.

often have less to lose. A momentum effort begins when what Moyer calls "rebels" either respond to or create trigger events that bring out large groups of protesters (column 4). When this explosion inevitably declines, the rebels assume that they have failed (column 6). But they *may* have initiated an ongoing shift in public opinion, as happened in the gay rights movement and may be happening with immigration. Even as mass participation declines, reform and other groups continue their work, and the public continues to transform its perspective over time, having the issue finally brought into relief. New trigger events keep the issue alive, along with media efforts and more. As rebel participation declines, institutional reform groups take advantage of shifting public opinion and drive specific changes in policy (Columns 7 and 8), becoming the holders and defenders of the vision long-term as the pillars of support under the powerful weaken. These reformers seem to take advantage of the work of the rebels as the rebels themselves are sidelined. In a sense, the reform components of these initially marginalized reform groups (or newly formed ones) become new pillars, and some members are allowed (inevitably also coopted to some extent) into the top of the pyramid. In the end, the perspective of the public is transformed and at least some concrete changes have been attained. The women suffrage movement was not simply about vote, for example. It was one step toward the larger transformation in the position of women in America, and the League of Women voters came out of one of the Suffrage organizations.

The gay rights movement is a good example. Legal efforts to make gay sex illegal, and then the AIDS crisis and the deaths of thousands, generated explosions of activism like those led by ACT-UP.[25] As public opinion shifted in their direction, however, more reform-minded groups began to take responsibility for the AIDS fight and ACT-UP faded as a movement. Reform and advocacy groups were able to negotiate with the health-industrial complex to extend on early successes of activists, even as ACT-UP members despaired at the loss of the "beloved community."[26] Again, Moyer's model implies that this tension is somewhat inevitable and must be understood and accepted if change is to happen. In some cases, this integration can happen more seamlessly, however, as when the M15 movement in Spain, which informed the structure of Occupy, agreed to form its own political party.[27]

In general, civil resistance is grounded in a pragmatic sense in forms of collaboration but draws practically from a wide range of practices. Leadership, as in the solidarity tradition, is central to this pragmatic vision, and these leaders often play the roles of organizer and leader at the same time. The movement oriented aspects of civil resistance aim at *power with*, but the full ecology of the approach usually integrates itself into the system eventually, gaining *power over* in ways that the initial instigators may find distasteful. In fact, when the movement fails to shift to more *power over* aspects of the ecology, this can indicate a real potential loss of power, as when Occupy failed to make any demands, or when the Egyptians Tahrir Square activists in the Arab Spring failed to put forward their own governance structures and thus were overwhelmed by the Islamic Brotherhood.[28] Civil resistance, when it is most successful, seems to maintain multiple streams of action, drawing across multiple approaches to empowerment. As King did in Birmingham with images of children battered by water cannons, power is generated most fundamentally by intervening in different creative ways in the *invisible* cultural understandings of society in an effort to dissolve support for the status quo and force those dependent on this popular support to change their ways.

Notes

1 Engler and Engler, *This is an Uprising.*
2 Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2015).
3 Key writers on civil resistance, in addition to the Englers are again usually nonacademics. They include Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Srdja Popovic, Andrej Milivojevic,

and Slobodan Djinovic, *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points* (Belgrade: CANVAS, 2006); Carlos Saavedra and Paul Engler, *Momentum Webinars*, June 10, 2018, www.youtube.com/playlist?reload=9&list=PLeJeAirMA52r-CePt4WuuZPD1WXb2Jnd5H; Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Manchester, NH: Extending Horizons Books, 2005); and Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas.* See also Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi To the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and Kurt Schock, The Practice and Study of Civil Resistance. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50, no. 3 (2013): 277–290.

4 For an overview, see David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publication, 2004).

5 See, e.g., Pauline Dibben, "Social Movement Unionism," in *Trade Unions and Democracy: Strategies and Perspectives*, edited by Mark Harcourt and Geoffrey Wood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

6 Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, "Disruptive Dissensus: People and Power in the Industrial Age," in *Reflections on Community Organization: Enduring Themes and Critical Issues*, edited by John Rothman (Itasca, IL: Peacock, 1999), 185–186. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

7 Von Hoffman, *Radical.*

8 Heidi J. Swarts, *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-Based Progressive Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 52; see Chambers and Cowan, *Roots for Radicals.*

9 Engler and Engler, *This is an Uprising*; Saavedra and Engler, *Momentum Webinars*; Popovic, Milivojevic, and Djinovic, *Nonviolent Struggle*; Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings On His Life, Work, and Ideas,* Vintage, 2012); Bill Moyer, Joann MacAllister, Mary Lou Finley, and Steven Soifer, *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001).

10 Alinsky, *Reveille*, and Engler and Engler, *This Is an Uprising.*

11 Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement Of The Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

12 Engler and Engler, *This Is an Uprising*, 173.

13 McAdam, *Political Process and Black Insurgency.*

14 Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, discusses the contribution of social media in this process.

15 Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle.*

16 Moyer, MacAllister, Finley, and Soifer, *Doing Democracy*; Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012).

17 Engler and Engler, *This Is an Uprising*, 210, 221.

18 "Immigration," *Gallup*, ND, http://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx.

19 Chris Nichols, "Do Three-Quarters of Americans Support the DREAM Act? Nancy Pelosi Says So," *Politifact*, September 19, 2017, www.politifact.com/california/statements/2017/sep/19/nancy-pelosi/nancy-pelosi-claims-three-quarters-americans-suppo/.

20 Engler and Engler, *This Is an Uprising*, 150.
21 Von Hoffman, *Radical*.
22 Elizabeth Kolbert, "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds," *The New Yorker* 27, no. 2017 (2017): 47.
23 Peter Berkowitz, *Constitutional Conservatism: Liberty, Self-Government, and Political Moderation* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2013).
24 Moyer, MacAllister, Finley, and Soifer, *Doing Democracy*, 11.
25 Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
26 Ibid.
27 "How the Spanish Political Laboratory is Reconfiguring Democracy," *The Conversation*, March 22, 2017, http://theconversation.com/how-the-spanish-political-laboratory-is-reconfiguring-democracy-74874
28 Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*.

9 Ecologies of empowerment?

There is, I have argued in these pages, not one but instead a whole series of different approaches to empowerment, a few of which I have described, often through examples of specific models of action, Each form has a particular relationship with "power." Appendix 1 lays out some differences between different forms of empowerment in a schematic table. Individual empowerment, not surprisingly, focuses on *power to*, and excludes most other forms of power. Collaboration adds *power with*, but in the ideal embodies an ethic that prevents it from moving to *power over*. Its central ethic is one of discursive equality—everyone's voice should be valued the same—and this ethic can seem, as in Occupy, to hamper efforts to seek forms of power that might directly contest the powerful. In fact, collaboration struggles with the realities of power, resisting stronger forms of leadership.

To some extent, solidarity represents a kind of rebuke to collaboration. It is grounded in the very leadership that makes collaborators nervous, and it intentionally seeks *power over*, collapsing myriad participant voices into a single voice to demand change from the powerful. Where collaboration has a tense relationship with facilitation as an inevitable form of leadership, solidarity in the model of community organizing (and union organizing as well) embraces the facilitative and sometimes leader-like role of the organizer who keeps the entire system running. Yet, inside its groups organizing groups often deeply value collaboration as a process for determining how and when and about what they will act. Solidarity proponents see strict collaborators like those in Occupy as romantics, unwilling to face up to the realities of *zero-sum power* and the need to directly contest the powerful. Whether power is *zero-sum* or not, solidarity proponents argue that many of the powerful act as if it were. If the relatively powerless are not willing to grasp at their portion of *power over*, they are doomed to oppression by it. Solidarity groups create closed spaces where participants they work

together, and they teach their leaders the language of *hidden* power before emerging into the public to fight in *open* spaces to contest control in *invited* and *closed* spaces.

Counterscript runs across all of the different forms of empowerment in that any change in the world brings with it some change in the *invisible* social practices that people carry with them and that direct institutions. Each of the forms of power engages in counterscript in different ways. And counterscript is sometimes the central aim of action, as with ACT-UP and the "send in the clowns" demonstration. At momentscounterscript focused efforts can represent some of the most powerful and, as with Occupy's slogan of "the 99%," most enduring effects even after the context they emerged from have dissolved.

Civil resistance is grounded in the social movement vision of organizing. Among the "rebels" that launch or intensify the early fights for change, organization is much more fluid and unpredictable than in the solidarity tradition. The focus is on gaining increasing *power with*, often in creative actions that may seek specific outcomes. In the end, momentum efforts are grounded in a counterscript strategy, seeking to shift the social perspective of the wider population and reduce the power of those who might think that they hold the levers of *power over* in society. It uses *power with* to reveal the myth of *power over.* By itself, as in Occupy, the capacity of civil resistance "rebels" to sustain change is limited. It is by becoming part of an ecology with other forms of empowerment, especially more or less accountable "reform" groups in the solidarity tradition, that change precipitated by the "rebels" is able to solidify.

These different forms cannot easily be fit together. However, it is also clear that by themselves each individual strategy is limited. In fact, a group of prominent scholars whose work focuses on collaboration has increasingly latched onto the idea of a "discursive system," sometimes using Engler and Engler's term "ecology" as the only way collaborative democracy could possibly operate as part of an actual governance system. Drawing from a "systems" conception of democracy allows deliberative democrats to look beyond standard forms of collaboration and celebrate aspects of empowerment that might seem opposed to deliberation. "Highly partisan rhetoric," for example, could be seen as contributing to a deliberative vision of empowerment if it were a component of a larger, centrally deliberative system. A manifesto written by many of the most prominent proponents of deliberative democracy even acknowledges that when seen from a systemic standpoint "two wrongs can make a right. Two venues, both with deliberative deficiencies, can each make up for the deficiencies of the

other." In other words, whether a practice is empowering is deeply dependent upon the milieu of institutions and social practices it operates within. "Conversely, an institution that looks deliberatively exemplary on its own…can look less beneficial in a systemic perspective when it displaces other useful deliberative institutions, such as partisan or social movement bodies."[1] From a pragmatic standpoint, to know if a particular effort is "empowering" in the manner one values, one must look at how it operates within its environment.

For example, recent scholars have increasingly emphasized the extent to which many blacks in the South during the civil rights movement were armed with guns and even used them on occasion. Scholars argue that the *visible* nonviolent aspects were able to succeed in part because racist individuals and institutions knew that any violence on their part might lead to a violent response, that there were *concealed* guns. In other words, nonviolence may have been in some sense dependent, counter-intuitively, upon a commitment to armed self-defense that rarely emerged into the vision of the media but was well understood by actors on the ground. The potential for violent response was important in maintaining the safety of the nonviolent protesters.[2] Nonviolence worked in part because this approach operated in an ecology that included armed blacks ready to "shoot back." Similarly, there is some evidence that King was able to win some concessions because he looked moderate in the context of violent riots exploding in urban centers around the U.S. An empowerment effort in this sense never operates in isolation.

Fundamentally, this group of discursive democracy scholars argues that you cannot know what will count as empowering until you understand the ecology in which a particular intervention operates. This makes it even more important to understand what different empowerment practices do and do not "do," because only by understanding this can we discern how different efforts affect each other in a complex, tension-filled environment. "A systemic approach allows us to see more clearly where a system might be improved, and recommend institutions or other innovations that could supplement the system in areas of weakness."[3]

This "discursive system" or "ecological" perspective is an important addition to efforts to understand which forms of empowerment to engage in at any point. Hopefully an ecology perspective can help actors move beyond the conflict over ethics and goals that seem to infuse some of these discussions. At the same time, there is something to be said for purity. While certainly, it could have been improved, it is an open question whether Occupy could have accomplished what it did or

created the human networks that emerged from it, had it given up on its utopian vision of a new society. Would ACT-UP have been as powerful if it had known ahead of time that it was going to have to cede its control to the reformist groups that it existed partially as a critique of? Certainly some, like David Graeber (who was involved in Occupy's creation), still believe that the Occupy vision of a more collaboratively based society is possible. Overall, the ecological vision is a critical conceptual tool for spreading forms of empowerment more widely and more reliably. But you will not necessarily be able to convince proponents of one or another specific form about this, and each approach does have compelling arguments in favor of it.

This text was written in part for people working on the ground, as it were. But it is not a textbook, nor does it provide a series of easy-to-follow blueprints for how to engage in empowerment in different contexts. Instead the goal has been more modest. The fact is that different forms of empowerment in institutions, e.g., in schools, are rarely considered in any comprehensive fashion. Empowerment is implied in everything educators do, for example, but, with the partial exception of writings on social justice, we rarely think in any explicit way about what *kind* of empowerment we are trying to foster. Standard visions of *individual* empowerment are so embedded in the practices of most educators, from teachers to pastors to youth workers to social workers, that there is little need to even use the term. But I have tried to show that the individual approach is very limited as an empowerment tool. Of course, the other forms of empowerment are also limited, each in their own way. But too frequently, we fail to even try them out.

The more we understand about the possibilities and limitations of each approach, the more we will be able to choose in coherent ways what we want to accomplish. Of course, those who work in institutions face real risks if they start encouraging people to resist these institutions, and institutions are likely to sanction such efforts. This is the lesson that solidarity, momentum, and other similar approaches teach us. More generally, because one never knows what will happen, action is always risky. What risks are we willing to take?

Practitioners are often honestly limited by their placement in institutions in the forms of empowerment they can promote. There is no need to apologize for this. I work in an institution myself and have faced my own limits in a university about what can be taught (and how much we can talk about what is taught) to our students. Readers must decide for themselves what they can and cannot do in the contexts they find themselves. So, in the end, this little book is an appeal to think more creatively and broadly about how we can engage those we work

with in "empowerment," an appeal to think more critically about what can and cannot be done where we are. And perhaps an appeal to seek out new spaces where new forms of empowerment can be fostered.

Are we satisfied with how our educational practices currently provide skills for action? What kinds of practices will our learners need to survive in the world? Is it enough in marginalized communities, for example, for a very small number of individuals to "succeed," while they are torn, often in traumatic ways from their communities? What kinds of skills are we ethically called to teach? These are critical questions, especially in the polarized world we live in today. Can we help our students turn this polarization into an opportunity? Or will we let the moment slip by?

Let me conclude with two brief examples. King began his fight for civil rights with a house full of guns in Montgomery. He and his community brought much to the table, with a long history of social struggle. But they needed to be educated in nonviolence and other civil resistance strategies by Bayard Rustin and others.[4] Similarly, James Farmer went to Nashville during the civil rights movement to create a school for nonviolence, and his students eventually spread across the South teaching the Gandhian gospel.[5] What would the civil rights movement have looked like without Rustin's and Farmer's and others' teachings? What would the civil rights movement have looked like without those who were willing to take the risk to empower?

Notes

1 Parkinson and Mansbridge, *Deliberative Systems*, 3.
2 Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).
3 Parkinson and Mansbridge, *Deliberative Systems*, 4.
4 David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004).
5 Larry W. Isaac, Daniel B. Cornfield, Dennis C. Dickerson, James M. Lawson, and Jonathan S. Coley, "'Movement Schools' and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis: Nashville Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights," in *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change*, edited by Sharon Nepstad and Lester R. Kurtz (New York: Emerald Group, 2012).